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## THE INFLUENCE OF JESUS ON SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

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A SOCIAL institution is "an establishment for the promotion of some object; an organized society or body of persons, usually with a fixed place of assemblage and operation, devoted to a special pursuit or purpose; as, an educational institution; a charitable institution; the Smithsonian Institution at Washington." In this definition of the *Century Dictionary* emphasis is placed on conscious coöperation for a definite object. But popular language justifies a less distinctive use of the word: "Established rule or order; a principle of procedure in any relation; custom; more specifically, an established habit of action, or body of related facts, regulating human conduct in the attainment of a social end, and constituting an element in the social organization or civilization of a community; as, government, the family, a language." Institutions are parts of human conduct, the manifestation of the inner life.

Much is said in scorn of social machinery, but institutions are more vital and sensitive than machines; they are nearer like the body which feels every motion of the soul. Institutions are the expressions of social ideals, the utterance of what associated men are thinking, desiring, seeking. They are more than this: they are indispensable means of realizing social ideals, as hands and tools are necessary to the embodiment of the plans of an architect. It is by language that the poet gives to his fancies a local habitation and a name. Thomas Chalmers wisely warned against a superfine spirituality which would have frowned upon the incarnation itself as materialistic: "The deadlier mischief of a certain error which has received the utmost countenance and

support from a large class of religionists. What we allude to is their distaste towards all kinds of external machinery, for the furtherance of any Christian enterprise. . . . And hence, with many, is there a total indolence and unconcern as to all outward arrangements; and everything like a visible apparatus appears insignificant in their eyes. . . . They would restrain human activity from putting itself forth on any palpable subject, and would sit in a sort of a mystic and expectant quietism, till there came down upon us from the skies the visitation of that inspiring energy which is to provide for all, and to do all." (*Works*, Vol. XV, p. 37.)

Institutions are not merely the effective instrument of social impulses, but they also react on thought and motive. Pose and gesture awaken emotion. Standing erect gives courage. The setting up of a library excites an appetite for literature. A saloon depraves morals. Church bells set religious memories in vibration. A vicious taxing system increases smuggling, bribery, and perjury. Institutions are in organic and reciprocal relations with the inner life; they are both cause and effect. To promote truth and justice Jesus established the church.

The forms of social institutions are as varied as the wants and desires of mankind. Man is many-sided. By his body he is akin to the humble races; by his spirit he is in commerce with the skies. He has created institutions because only by associated action could he attain his ends. Out of the nature and conscious needs of man have grown families, schools, newspapers, industrial systems, customs, languages, governments, churches.

What has been the influence of Jesus on these social institutions? The attempt of apologists to found an argument on the beneficent effects of Christianity, or of the church, has always been challenged by unbelief. The challenge is not without cause, though not for the reasons given by the skeptical. Apologists have frequently undermined theism in the honest desire to strengthen historic Christianity. It is a fatal mistake to divorce the life power of Jesus from the whole divine energy of goodness which the world manifests. Jesus himself declared: "All

that the Father hath is mine." The only solid basis for theism and for Christianity is the sublime doctrine of the Word which speaks creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him. . . . In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . There was the true light, even the light which lighted every man." John caught this thought, and the Alexandrian Greek Christians diffused it. Some branches and members of the church have, with serious loss, overlooked it. It will always be impossible to separate absolutely the influence of Christianity as historically manifested in the person of Jesus from the universal action of his Holy Spirit in mankind. If it were possible to prove that the portion of good embodied in the church were the only divine blessing, then belief in a good and righteous God would receive a paralyzing shock.

Take, for example, the influence of Stoic philosophy in the Roman empire before the apostolic story of Jesus began to be felt. It seems certain that the lot of slaves and of children was ameliorated; that kindness was more general; that the poor were more tenderly treated; that legislation was made more just. The only adequate explanation of this fact is that it came from the same divine source from which Christianity issued. Ackermann wrote of "The Christian Element in Plato." That element has always been in the world; it is the foundation of the world. The Christ blood cannot be dissected out of the history of mankind without leaving it a corpse.

And yet the personality of Jesus has produced such a peculiar impression that it has a distinguishing character. One can follow the steps of Christ through history by the signs of his blessed presence.

"And the pleasant water-courses,  
You could trace them through the valley,  
By the rushing in the springtime,  
By the alders in the summer,  
By the white fog in the autumn,  
By the black line in the winter."

It is possible to discover and measure the deflection from the

orbit of a planet produced by the attraction of a great globe unseen. In philosophy men follow the traces of Aristotle far down through Arabian and European speculation. Sir Walter Scott's personality made itself felt in a mass of literature. Great sculptors, painters, and architects have founded schools of imitators. "Browning clubs" are witnesses of the wonderful power of a great genius. In the business world the successful manager gathers about him an army of superintendents, agents, and employés who catch his spirit and are in harmony with his methods. The military genius of Grant transformed the federal army and turned defeat into victory. It is not utterly impossible, though it is difficult, to trace the specific effects of the life of Jesus on social conduct.

We must not make the mistake of thinking of the influence of Jesus as proceeding merely from his earthly ministry. Important things have been done by him since Pilate sealed his tomb. Bancroft wrote of William Pitt's posthumous influence: "The strings he had struck with power still vibrated, his light like that of an 'annihilated star' still shone brilliantly on the world." The influence of Jesus ought not to be compared to that of a long dead star, but rather to that of an ever-burning sun.

History shows a vast difference between pagan and Christian lands. Culture and humanity have reached and held the loftiest levels in the realms of the cross. Christianity derives not merely name but character and power from its author. Those who have been the most numerous and important contributors to the higher life of Christendom ascribe to Jesus the springs of their conduct. Therefore, the influence of the man of Nazareth must have been both potent and beneficent.

Not merely ecclesiastics, but men of a layman's disposition, thoroughly secular, recognize this presence. Lincoln's reverent description is typical: "He whose wisdom surpasses that of all philosophers." Herder, in revolt against clericalism, could say of the Master: "As a spiritual Savior of his race he wished to form divine men, who, under whatever laws it might be, should advance the welfare of others from pure principles of right, and, willing themselves to suffer, should reign as kings in the realm

of truth and benevolence." And Emerson's testimony must be regarded as impartial: "The unique impression of Jesus upon mankind, whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world."

A newspaper reporter has shown the influence of Jesus on the customs of a wild and wayward community of the frontier. Men still living can remember when portions of Texas were possessed by desperadoes. Fugitives from justice peopled the land. "Among them went Methodism, the American church militant. It dealt mighty blows. It laid out waste lands. It built churches. It established schools. It taught the heathen to send contributions to the heathen. It was on the side of law and order. Its weapon was two-edged, religious and social. . . . Horse racing became unpopular. Cock fighting went into the limbo of the past. Gone was the time when a district judge would adjourn court in order to break a faro bank. The country dance, with its accompanying quart bottle of cheap whiskey hidden in the corner of a rail fence, was frowned down. . . . Across the face of this land is written 'Prosperity.' Methodism did it." And Methodism is simply one work of Jesus Christ. The most fundamental and universal social institution, the family, has in all Christian times and lands felt the power of the name of Jesus. Infancy has been made sacred by the manger of Bethlehem. The crèche is inspired by that humble birthplace of the Holy Child. Infanticide and exposure of children, the prevalent vice of antiquity, have come under the ban of his word which blessed little children. In spite of the savage passions of men and the morbid notions of ascetic celibates, the teaching of Jesus has prevailed to hold the world to a sane and healthy estimate of marriage. Barbarians and anchorites have maligned womankind, but the mother of Jesus has been made an object of admiring adoration. In our own day Christian thought centers in the exaltation of the family to its true place of dignity and power, and consecrated talent is toiling at the problem of its restoration.

The story of the influence of Jesus on care for the poor is too long to repeat here. He "went about doing good." He fed

the hungry multitudes, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, told glad tidings to the poor. For love of him the whole church became an association for relief of distress. Labor was held in honor. The bishop's house became a hospital, the germinal social cell which split up into a thousand specialized forms of beneficence. The monastery in its days of youthful purity, the mediæval orders of charity, the "inner mission" of all modern lands, bear witness to the spiritual agency of the Founder. The King's Daughters bear his silver cross. In his name mighty works are done. Asylums for the crippled, the insane, the outcast, the criminal, the outworn, have that Name graved over their portals.

The influence of Jesus in industrial and commercial institutions has been great and increasing, though the mode of its exercise is not always clearly seen. The form of industrial organization is decided by the conditions of the age and people. We can trace a development from slavery, through serfdom to the capital-wage system of our day, and we can see the divine suggestions of still higher forms of coöperation yet to be evolved. Apparently this order is natural and inevitable. Certainly Jesus and his followers never sought to subvert it by violence or sudden change. The influence of Jesus came down as dew and sunshine along the whole process. The accidental and temporary ranking of men was ignored, or was felt to be insignificant when all were treated as heirs of God.

In our own day the ideal man is still the Carpenter of Nazareth, the constructive workman. The labor question is kept alive more by aspiration than by hunger. Each man has a value in himself. Jesus' estimate of the soul as worth more than the whole world is silently fixing higher market prices of human flesh and toil. Men cannot be regarded as mere means to the ends of masters, since each has infinite consideration with the Judge of all the earth. A famous socialist has offered this testimony: "If Christianity had been interpreted and applied in the spirit of Jesus Christ, if it had been well known and faithfully practiced by the numerous portions of Christians who are animated by a sincere piety, and who have only need to know truth

well to follow it, this Christianity, its morals, its philosophy, its precepts, would have sufficed and would still suffice to establish a perfect society and political organization, to deliver humanity from the evil which weighed it down, and to assure the happiness of the human race on the earth." (Cabet, *Le Vrai Christianisme*; quoted by C. L. Brace in *Gesta Christi*, p. 419.)

The influence of Jesus on labor unions in this country is very remarkable, and is best expressed in the language of selected leaders. We may not think the criticism of the church and clergy altogether fair and just, but we must be glad that a divine leaven is at work even when all things ecclesiastical are suspected or detested. One says: "He taught the basic principles of brotherhood. This admiration extends to a very great degree to non-church members. Many times when His principles are announced they are cheered, while ministers of the church are hissed. Many who admire the character of Christ do not feel cordial toward the churches, because there are none in the church who practice Christ's teachings, nor will allow it in their business." Another says: "Wage workers love Him as a fellow-sufferer, and waste small time discussing his divinity. True admiration of the character of Christ is in itself unimpeachable indictment of the church. The followers of Christ are of necessity opposed to cant, hypocrisy, and Pharisaism; they believe the deed should follow the word; they believe in a brotherhood through Jesus which is real, sincere, and inspiring." Another writes: "As a representative of men in railway service I would say that belief in the teachings of Christ and admiration for his character are stronger." Preachers are often distrusted because it is believed they side with wealth rather than with laborers.

The influence of Jesus upon the valuation of human life has been simply beyond estimate. We recall the scene in the Tower, in that drama of conscience which Shakespeare created under the title "King Richard III." Consider the awful dream which guilty Clarence had, and his awakening to hear the stealthy steps of the murderers sent to assassinate him in his cell. Desperate and unfeeling men stood ready to stab him, and in his

extremity he made the most touching plea for mercy and respite which ever was laid upon human hearts :

I charge you, as you hope for any goodness,  
By Christ's dear blood shed for our grievous sins,  
That you depart and lay no hands on me.

The wit of despair, the genius of the consummate master of dramatic art, could not remember nor invent a more moving argument than "Christ's dear blood." Clarence knew that if this picture of divine compassion could not melt their hearts, his case was hopeless. If there was not persuasive magic in that formula, then speech was vain. He must die. Rejecting Christ's love, they could not be swayed by any inferior argument.

Educational institutions have grown up wherever the print of Jesus' steps has marked the earth. There had been schools before Christianity, and the Jews apparently established some primary schools about the time of Jesus. Under Mohammedanism learning flourished. The church has not been the sole support of establishments for promoting investigation and instruction. But the place of Jesus in the history of education is unique. He did not merely provide for education as an annex to his system, as a means of conquest and control. The peculiar fact about his church was that it was itself a community of learners in which he was the supreme teacher. The Great Commission bristles with pedagogic suggestions. The business of the missionary is to "make disciples," to gather a school; to teach them the doctrines of Christ, the law of the King; and to expect his perpetual presence among them. The Great Commission was given to the college of apostles, and it made them educators. Their only weapon of world conquest was the truth. Conversions were to be the result of the teaching process, in which the Holy Spirit was the efficient agent. Armies and edicts they could not command. Liberation was to follow the Lord's emancipation proclamation: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The church from the beginning was itself a school, and every member was a student.

Ancient civilization, founded on slave labor and on political aristocracy, could not thus treat all subjects. Schools were for

the rich and the great. But in giving to the world the most sublime and profound doctrines, Christ ventured to make all citizens of his kingdom his intellectual heirs. Scholarship, and that in the most difficult fields of thought, was to be the business of the disciples. The very designation "disciple" stamps the community of the faithful with this character. The risk of abuse and perversion was great, but a safeguard was provided in the gift of the Holy Spirit who should be the "guide into all truth."

But Christianity has been compelled to work out its task of education through conflicts with most appalling difficulties. It must wait for the slow ripening of human faculties, for the tedious development of organisms. It must toil in the miasmatic swamps of decayed heathenism. It must clash with barbarian hordes whose ideals were those of the dark forests, the bloody battlefields, and the illiterate soldier. Most of all the original light of Christ was dimmed by the dusty windows of the church itself, through which it reached the worshippers. Besotted priests, ignorant ecclesiastics, often appointés of rude barbarians, landlords, and princes, were not fit instructors of the school of disciples. Clerical ambition, akin to the greed of a slave-holding oligarchy, sought to hold the people in intellectual dungeons. And yet we must not be too severe and so unfair. It was during the so-called Dark Ages that Christianity wrought an educational miracle. Compayré quotes a comparison of Jouffroy: "The invasion of the barbarians into the midst of ancient society was like an armful of green wood thrown upon a blazing fire: at first there could issue from it only a mass of smoke."

In 1179 the third Lateran council promulgated the following decree: "The church of God, being obliged, like a good and tender mother, to provide for the bodily and spiritual wants of the poor, desirous to procure for poor children the opportunity for learning to read, and for making advancement in study, orders that each cathedral shall have a teacher charged with the gratuitous instruction of the clergy of that church, and also of the indigent scholars, and that he be assigned a benefice, which, sufficient for his subsistence, may thus open the door of the school to the studious youth. A tutor shall be installed in the

other churches, and in the monasteries where formerly there were funds set apart for this purpose."

Monasteries and orders not only transcribed the precious manuscripts which kept alive the spirit of the old culture, but they transformed the minds of savages and gave them letters, manners, thirst for knowledge, culture. The schools of Charlemagne were not entirely successful, but they flashed a light upon the intellect of Europe, and kept alive the traditions of Christianity as the religion of truth.

"Shy yearnings of the savage,  
Unfolding thought by thought,  
To holy lives are lifted,  
To visions fair wrought.

O Toiler of the lily !  
Thy touch is in the man !  
No leaf that dawns to petal  
But hints the angel plan."

Humanism and Renaissance were a legitimate protest against the darkening process of priestly repression, and in their very orgies of self indulgence bear witness to the native capacity for expansion. Luther's plea for public schools was not his own invention, but a revival of the doctrine of Jesus. In the modern period we must confess for the church frequent neglect and apathy, but the ferment of the divine word has worked unceasingly.

In no country has the religion of Jesus produced more direct educational fruits than in America. Our New England fathers planted church and school side by side, component parts of one Christian community. Over the portal of classic Harvard they inscribed the legend, "For Christ and his church."

The old Baptist church in the state founded by Roger Williams built an edifice to worship Almighty God and hold commencements in. In the argument of that noble historic instrument, the Ordinance of 1787, which gave a free charter to our great Northwest, religion and learning are called the two main supports of the political structure. At a time when bread and salt were hard to get the representative pioneers, Christians all, thought that religion, and not bread alone, is a necessity of states, and that learning is its worthy expression.